

# **California's Parent Empowerment law**

## **What is the Parent Empowerment Act?**

California's landmark Parent Empowerment Act (also known as the "Parent Trigger") empowers communities of parents at chronically low-performing schools to jumpstart a process of positive transformation of their children's schools using the tools of community organizing.

## **Why do we need it?**

Far too many California schools fail to adequately serve the needs of our children. Only a fraction of Black and Latino students leave high school prepared for college in core subject areas (4% and 11% respectively). California's 4<sup>th</sup> grades placed fifth worst in the nation in math and fourth worst in reading. Parents cannot afford to simply wait while the system continues to fail their children year after year.

## **How does it give leverage to parents?**

A petition by a majority of parents at chronically low-performing can force their district to implement one of several school turnaround options, giving parents unprecedented bargaining power to force school districts to be responsive to the needs of their children. These school turnaround options are taken from President Obama's Race to the Top program and include the ability to bring in new school staff or new management via a non-profit charter school operator.

## **Does it work?**

Absolutely. Just four years into the passage of this unprecedented law, parents in at least five chronically underperforming schools have used the law to transform their schools. Each Parents Union organization had different goals for their school transformation, and each used the leverage given to them by the Parent Empowerment Act in very different ways, but all were successful in using community organizing to achieve better educational opportunities for their children.

## **How does it work?**

The State Board of Education promulgated implementing regulations for the Parent Empowerment Act in September 2011, following almost a year of debate and discussion. These regulations contain detailed and specific requirements for how parents and school districts are to successfully implement the Act.

## **What schools are eligible?**

Only schools in California that have been on Program Improvement for four or more years and that have an API score of under 800 are eligible for transformation under the Act. Furthermore, the law was designed as a pilot project – it only allows for petitions to be submitted at 75 schools throughout the state.

## **What is the legislative history?**

The original law was passed in 2010 with bipartisan support and bipartisan co-authors. There was an attempt to amend the law in 2011 but Governor Brown vetoed it, saying he wanted to give the law and the new regulations adequate time a chance to work in their current form.